



Office of the Mayor

NEWS RELEASE

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Mayor Luecke names Howard Buchanan as Fire Chief

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Howard W. Buchanan II, Assistant Chief for Fire Prevention, was named today (April 12, 2007) by Mayor Stephen J. Luecke as the 29th Fire Chief in the South Bend Fire Department's 154-year history.

A 34-year veteran of the department, Buchanan, 56, will begin official duties Monday (April 16, 2007), succeeding retiring Chief Luther J. Taylor Sr., whose 21 years as fire chief was the longest in the city's history.

"It's going to be tough for anyone to follow Luther, but Howard has the experience and leadership ability to step up," Luecke said. The mayor interviewed candidates recommended by outgoing Chief Taylor as well as consulted with others in the department and in the broader community before making his decision. "Howard brings a breadth of experience at the fire department. He's well-respected in the community and by the rank and file. He's got a good temperament for the job and strong people skills."

Buchanan may be the first chief to "hit every plateau" in ascending through the ranks. He joined the department as a firefighter Nov. 5, 1973. He was promoted to captain in 1976, and served as a HAZ-MAT team leader from 1980 until being named battalion chief in 1992. In April 2002, Buchanan was named an assistant chief with responsibilities for fire prevention, business and residential inspection, arson investigation and public education.

Taylor and Buchanan both were promoted to the rank of captain at the same time in 1976. "I've seen Howard rise through the ranks, being a good leader and having good leadership skills. ... He's an all-out people person," Taylor said. "I'm very pleased Mayor Luecke has entrusted Howard Buchanan to take over the department. I certainly feel that he will lead the department in a positive direction."

Buchanon's experience includes serving as the liaison between the fire department and the 911 Communications center, as a member of the Mayor's Neighborhood Task Force that addresses priority concerns and to oversee construction of the Central Fire Station and the new Fire Station No. 2, expected to be complete in July.

Taylor described Buchanon's current responsibilities as vital preparation for serving as chief. "Howard's ability to work with the public has been proven, whether in building construction, in an inspection with issues that need to be resolved, or in the eyes of the public," Taylor said. "If there is anything that needs to be looked at carefully, he's good at that."

Buchanon said he never thought he'd be in the position to be considered as fire chief, but followed up on the advice of mentors like Jack Reed, former assistant to the mayor and 28-year veteran of the fire department, to always be prepared.

"Whether I got it or not, it was an honor just being at the level where I'd be considered," Buchanon said.

Buchanon admitted he has "a tremendous act to follow" after Chief Taylor.

"My biggest challenge will be to try to keep ... the department at the level it's at right now," he said. "I'll have some key people that I have to have around me, because that's what made him successful."

With one existing vacancy at battalion chief, two assistant chief retirements in July and a third created by his appointment, Buchanon will have the opportunity to build a new generation of fire department leadership.

"The No. 1 thing is building a good working relationship with the firefighters, particularly with Local 362," Taylor said. "Working together, we can accomplish so many things. ... It's very important they understand you, and you understand them and have confidence in one another."

Luecke, Buchanon and Taylor each pointed to plans for a seven-county fire safety training facility on 50 acres near the South Bend Regional Airport as a place where Buchanon can begin to craft a new legacy.

"South Bend has been in the lead position in putting together the proposal," Luecke said. "We need to work on driving that forward, but we also need to work on getting participation ... to see if there's support for a joint effort to be able to fast-track this."

"We need that for our city, for our firefighters, for the county and not just for us, but for the whole region," said Buchanon, who sees safety and training as a key focus of his leadership as chief.

Buchanan has an associate's degree in visual communications with special focus in photography from Ivy Tech State College. In addition he has completed coursework for river rescue, hazardous materials technician, fire instructor I, fire officer I, HAZ-MAT II, Tactical Rescue and Incident Command.

Buchanon has received several community awards including the 1999 YMCA Urban Youth Services Mentor of the Year, the 2002 YMCA Urban Youth Services Community Service award, the 2002 Man of the Year award and a 2006 Mayors' Drum Major Award for Community Service from Luecke and Mishawaka Mayor Jeff Rea for his work as a youth mentor and community volunteer. His expertise as a firefighter was lauded by the State Inspectors Association, which in July 2006 gave him its 10th annual State Inspector of the Year Award.

A past president of the Downtown South Bend Rotary Club, Buchanan has been co-chair of the United Way campaign for the City of South Bend and participated in the St. Joseph County Chamber of Commerce leadership program. He also has served on boards or as a volunteer associated with Community Coordinated Child Care, mental health, the American Cancer Society, the American Red Cross, Big Brothers/Big Sisters in the school mentor program, the Boy Scouts, the Boys & Girls Club, Family & Children's Center Foundation and Holy Cross.

He and his wife, Mary, have a daughter, LaTisha, who lives in Connecticut and a son, Travis, who is stationed with the U.S. Navy in Norfolk, Va., with his wife and children.

Buchanon is the son of the late Howard W. "Dink" Buchanon Sr., who died in 1999, and Loretha Buchanon, a retired principal from Harrison Primary Center as well as Coquillard and Greene elementary schools.